

Steen-Hall Eye Institute

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Tearing and Lacrimal Drainage System Disorders

The lacrimal (tear) system is a miniature drainage network which prevents tears from rolling continuously down the cheeks. From the surface of the eye, the tears flow along the edge of the eyelids toward the nose. Just before reaching the corner of the eye, the tears slide into two tiny drain tubes and then into a larger tube which carries the tears into the nose. This explains why crying often causes the nose to become congested.

Many problems may cause the tear system to drain poorly. For instance, an accident may cut one of the two tiny drain tubes, or a long-standing infection may scar these tubes. Tumors may even invade parts of the tear system. When the lacrimal drainage system becomes obstructed for any of these reasons, tears are unable to drain properly and tend to roll down the cheeks.

Therapy in the form of massage, warm compresses, and medications are often effective in reducing the obstruction. In other instances, surgical intervention is mandatory to obtain relief.

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